2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

[p. 27]

CHAPTER III

The Villages and Their Inhabitants

The villages with which this essay deals are the communities outside the densely populated built-up area which centres on Valletta. This area is contained in a rectangle formed by imaginary lines running from St. Julians' and Lija, and thence to Tarxien and Kalkara.[1] Many of these villages, however, are in reality rural towns with populations of up to 15,000, as in the case of Qormi. The Maltese do not distinguish linguistically between small villages and country towns, both are called 'villages' (*rhula*; sing. *rahal*). These are contrasted to *Il-Belt*, the City of Valletta, and its environs. Although I contrast town and country, it is worthwhile pointing once again to Malta's small size. No village in Malta is more than an hour's bus ride from Valletta, and Gozo is only thirty minutes by ferry from its larger sister island. Moreover, 'rival' villages are often no more than a few hundred yards apart.

I am here concerned with abstracting certain principles of social organization, and not with comparing the size and shape of residential groupings, although these two ends are obviously not completely unrelated. Consequently, the geographical limitations which I have placed upon this study are somewhat arbitrary. It is, perhaps, easier to think of the division between town and country as a continuum, with Valletta or Sliema at one end, and small villages such as Qrendi or Gharb at the other. Although much of the description and analysis which follows holds true for both town and village, I am here dealing specifically with the villages.

The separation between town and country corresponds to a rough division of economic and political power, for villagers look to the urban area for employment, income and patronage. First of all, the seat of government is in Valletta, and most of the senior civil servants live there or in Sliema, the sprawling residential suburb that has grown up opposite Valletta during the last 100 years. Secondly, almost all the professionals, wealthy business men,

[1] See the map of Malta and Gozo on page 2, above.